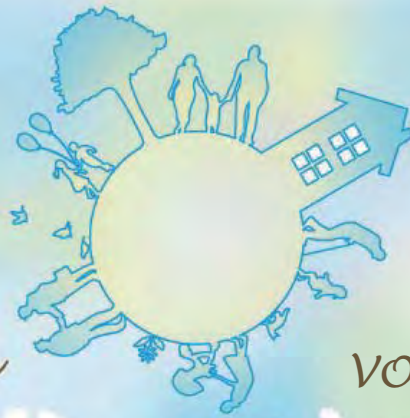


Living the LOTUS

Buddhism in Everyday Life



6
2019

VOL. 165

Founder's Essay

Eyes That See the Good in Others

ALTHOUGH nothing is as pleasing as receiving praise, people don't seem to like praising others.

I'm often asked, "How can I be like you and see people's good points without focusing on their faults?" I suspect that people only see other's shortcomings because their urge to compete is too strong. People do their utmost to protect themselves—including trying not to show their weaknesses—and most are not about to let themselves lose.

I don't attempt to "win" like that. Instead, I am quick to take my hat off to those who outshine me and ask them to teach me. Since we are all fellow children

of the Buddha, what sense is there in trying to compete with one another? With this way of thinking, we are released from the concern for self-defense that puts us in a straightjacket. This naturally engenders magnanimity that allows us to see the good in other people. We have eyes of compassion.

If a husband and wife can preserve this magnanimity, their everyday life will dramatically change. I believe that herein lies the secret to garnering sincere praise.

Nikkyo Niwano, *Kaiso zuikan* 9 (Kosei Publishing, 1997), pp. 250–51

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Rissho Kosei-kai is a global Buddhist movement of people who strive to apply the teachings of the Threefold Lotus Sutra, one of the foremost Buddhist scriptures, in their daily lives and contribute to world peace. It was founded in 1938 by Rev. Nikkyo Niwano (1906–1999) and Rev. Myoko Naganuma (1889–1957). With the guidance of President Nichiko Niwano, Rissho Kosei-kai members actively share the Dharma widely and engage in peace activities both locally and internationally in cooperation with people from many walks of life.

The title of this newsletter, *Living the Lotus—Buddhism in Everyday Life*, conveys our hope of striving to practice the teachings of the Lotus Sutra in daily life in an imperfect world to enrich and make our lives more worthwhile, like beautiful lotus flowers blooming in a muddy pond. This newsletter aims to help people around the world apply Buddhism more easily in their daily lives.

Studying the Buddha's Teachings

Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



Studying the Dharma Is Part of Daily Life

In chapter 2 of the Lotus Sutra, “Skillful Means,” we see the term “study”:

“[T]he Dharma of all buddhas is like this:
Employing thousands of millions of skillful means,
They teach the Dharma in whatever manner is appropriate.
Without sufficient study,
It cannot be fully comprehended.”

The buddhas use many means to expound the teaching appropriately to the people listening, but those “without sufficient study” cannot realize it. Conversely stated, through study, we should be able to realize, by ourselves, whatever lesson is necessary at that time.

Incidentally, the Japanese snowbell tree (*Styrax japonicus*), which has branches full of white blossoms at this time of year, is the subject of this poem: “A tree overflowing with voices: The snowbell is in full bloom.” While many people see the tree full of blossoms and think it looks beautiful, how refreshing is this sentiment of seeing the tree “overflowing with voices”? Thinking, then, about what these “voices” are telling us, I think they can teach us many things.

That the Buddha teaches the Dharma to each and every one of us in a manner appropriate to the time and circumstances is like the snowbell tree blooming in full glory, producing “voices” that tell some people to realize the principle of impermanence (which states that all things change unceasingly in the cycle of birth and death) while telling other people about the importance of living to the fullest in the present moment.

When we feel the workings of Truth within the natural world and in all sorts of happenings around us and we try to hear the voice of the Buddha therein, we become able to reflect upon our own arrogant or calculating minds, gain the courage to live honestly, and take a new step forward. The repetition of this process is “study.”





Practice of the Faith Is Itself “Study”

The things that happen around us every day are none other than the Dharma, which the Buddha is teaching us by employing “thousands of millions of skillful means.” Anyone who makes the effort to accept this fact can realize this.

However, rather than being merely something by which you gain knowledge, study is, through repetition of the practice, something that helps you make your own life one that aligns with the Buddha’s teaching. For example, let’s say that you are at odds with someone close to you. Before you blame that person, if you instead feel that he or she is teaching you that you have not been considerate enough, then you can make a sincere apology. Similarly, when facing a difficult situation, ask yourself, what is this situation teaching me right now? This leads to practicing a positive outlook and making it part of your way of life.

Even so, we cannot say that our minds are at peace at all times or capable of accepting whatever might happen as a lesson from the Buddha. Sometimes a realization comes quickly to our minds, but other times we are disturbed by doubt and uncertainty.

As members of Rissho Kosei-kai, what turns our doubting minds back toward the Buddha’s teaching are “reciting the sutra” and “guiding others to the faith, supporting our fellow members in the Way, and attending *hoza* sessions.” These two practices, along with “studying and practicing the Dharma,” are called the three basic practices of the faith. “Reciting the sutra” and “attending *hoza* sessions” fall within the sphere of study, and therefore we could say that a life firmly rooted in the faith can be summed up with this single word, study.

Turning now to why we study the Dharma, the answer is found in the lines of scripture that precede those cited above:

All I do is teach and transform bodhisattvas
Using the One Vehicle Way.
So none of my disciples are shravakas.

Just as this passage tells us, the bodhisattva spirit resides within us all. In other words, no one should think that things are all right just because he or she alone has happiness. In this sense, another important element of our study is to share the Dharma with other people because we want them to be happy, which brings with it the great joy and happiness of feeling united with others.

From *Kosei*, June 2019





What I Begin to See Beyond Challenges



Ms. Panyameepolkij Chantra
Rissho Kosei-kai of Bangkok

This Dharma Journey talk was presented at the Great Sacred Hall on March 1, 2019, during the ceremony for the first day of the month (Uposatha Day).

I WAS born in 1992 as the only daughter to my parents and the younger sister of my brother, in the Panyameepolkij family in Bangkok, the capital of Thailand.

I first learned about Rissho Kosei-kai when I was in the fifth grade. My cousin asked me if I would come with her to visit a place where we could study Japanese. As I was interested in learning Japanese, I accompanied her to the Dharma center of Bangkok without knowing anything about Rissho Kosei-kai. Learning Japanese was fun, and, more than anything else, I was happy to be with my favorite cousin. I started to visit the Dharma center with her from time to time. My cousin guided me to Rissho Kosei-kai's teachings and I joined the organization a while later.

Later that year, my cousin enrolled as an overseas student of Rissho Kosei-kai's Gakurin Seminary and went to Japan. Two years later, when my cousin graduated from the Gakurin Seminary and returned to Bangkok, I began to visit the Dharma center with her again. My cousin told me a lot about her experience in the Gakurin Seminary. What especially impressed me were her stories about Founder Nikkyo Niwano when he was in his forties. She told me that the Founder, wishing that all people would find happiness through the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, had undergone religious training by living apart from his family for a decade. Thanks to his religious training and his unrelenting effort to disseminate the Lotus Sutra not only in Japan but throughout the world, we could encounter the teaching of the Lotus Sutra. I was truly impressed by the life of the Founder and wanted to learn more about the teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai.

In 2012, when I was junior in university, Rev. Yoshio Sasagawa, then the minister of Rissho

Kosei-kai of Bangkok, asked me if I was interested in studying Buddhism at the Gakurin Seminary. He encouraged me to apply for the overseas students course. After thinking about it for days, I finally decided to go to Japan for two reasons. One was that I wanted to know the difference between Buddhism in Thailand and Buddhism in Japan. The other was that I thought living apart from my family would be a good challenge to let myself grow and become more independent. Until then my family had helped me, the smallest member of the family, in everything I did. My cousin encouraged me by saying, "At Gakurin, your life will probably change."

In April 2017, my life as a student of the Gakurin overseas students course began. When I was still feeling anxious about living in the dormitory apart from my family, the Japanese lessons began. Every day I studied for as long as ten hours in the Japanese-language school and in the dormitory, but my Japanese was not improving. I wondered why my effort, the hardest I had ever made in my life, wasn't



Ms. Chantra delivers her Dharma Journey talk at the Great Sacred Hall.

bringing about results. I was sad and cried sometimes. But I persisted with the study and was able to proceed to the second level at Gakurin a year later.

In my second year, the overseas students had Dharma dissemination training at a local Dharma center for two and a half months. The Dharma dissemination training was divided into two terms. The first term was three weeks long, and it began in May. The second term was seven weeks long, and it took place a few months later, beginning in September. The venue of my training was the Hamada Dharma Center in Shimane Prefecture, in western Japan.

I felt uneasy at first because the Hamada Dharma Center was distant from Gakurin and I was alone, separated from my classmates. When I first visited the Hamada Dharma Center, however, Rev. Emiko Watanabe, the center's minister, and the other members greeted me with brilliant smiles. I was very happy and my anxieties were relieved.

During the first Dharma dissemination training, I became acquainted with numerous members, spent time with them, and enjoyed delicious meals with them while I underwent many kinds of training. All of these experiences were precious gifts from the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, Founder Niwano, and President Niwano. I am truly grateful.

On the morning of September 22, I returned to the Hamada Dharma Center for my second term. I was jubilant to return and train again at the center. As soon as I stood at the entrance to the Hamada Dharma Center, the sangha members greeted me by saying, "Welcome home!" I was very happy, and my heart warmed.

As I was not good at talking about my own feelings in public, I was not able to speak about myself in *hoza* sessions during my first Dharma dissemination training. In the beginning of the second term, I made it my goal to speak to others about what was on my mind. Because of my lack of confidence, I found this hard at first. When I asked Rev. Watanabe for advice about my inability, she suggested that I should try to do something I thought I was poor at every day. I made it

a habit to do something I was weak at every day. After a while, I felt confidence begin to grow within.

One day, I accompanied a chapter head and a member of the Dharma center to visit the house of another member, Mrs. K. Mrs. K greeted us with a warm smile. She told us in tears that she had lost family members every year between 2011 and 2013, and now she lived alone. Listening to her story, my heart ached and I felt like crying. She told us that she had had no one to talk to about her experience, and so she had kept the pain to herself. Having shared the experience with us, she looked relieved. When we were leaving her home, Mrs. K thanked us. It was a gratifying moment for me. I was grateful for the opportunity to be able to pray for the happiness of Mrs. K.

Through this meeting with Mrs. K, I learned that when we listen to a person with all our heart and are genuinely considerate of his or her feelings, mutual understanding becomes reality, and the buddha-nature of that person begins to open up.

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to the members of the Hamada Dharma Center who prepared delicious meals for me every day. Thanks to them, fish has become my favorite food! Thank you for greeting me cheerfully every morning, and for always caring about me and offering me kind words. Thank you also for the wonderful sweets, which delighted me (and added a few pounds!). You are my second family. Please let me express my heartfelt appreciation to all of you.

Today I am honored to stand here to present a Dharma journey talk and represent the five students of Gakurin's twenty-fifth overseas students course. All of us students are very grateful for the ministers and members of the Dharma centers who warmly took care of us and watched over us like their real families during our Dharma dissemination training.

At the Gakurin Seminary, I learned that the members of our global sangha—even though we may come from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds—can achieve mutual understanding through studying and putting into practice the teachings of the

Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, Founder Niwano, and President Niwano.

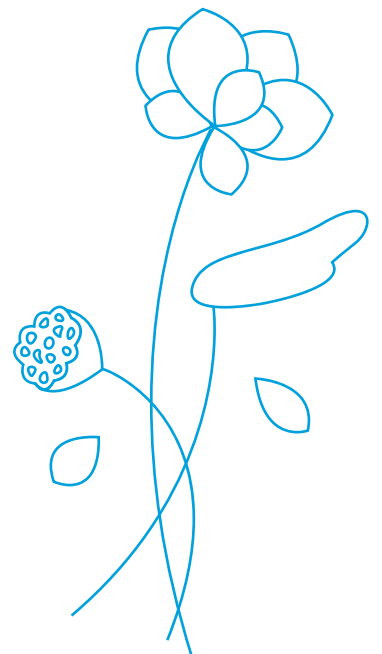
President Niwano taught us in his New Year's message the importance of being firmly resolved to move forward creatively. My dream is to become a science teacher at a junior high school in Thailand after my graduation from Gakurin. While teaching science in the classroom, I hope that I will be a teacher who can at the same time share with students a Buddhist way of thinking. I also hope that I will be able to assist Rev. Shoko Mizutani (the present minister of Rissho Kosei-kai of Bangkok) and the other staff members in the Dharma center in sharing the teachings I have learned in Gakurin with many other young people in Thailand.

The study of the teachings of the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni and Founder Niwano brought me to realize the importance of "thinking of others first" and the joy of doing my best for others. From this time on, I will make the most of my future encounters, always be open to others, and grow into being a person who can work for the happiness of others.

I would also like to express my gratitude to my parents, who enabled me to come to Japan to study at Gakurin and have this wonderful experience. Thank you very much for listening.



Ms. Chantra (right) and her classmates of the Gakurin Overseas Students Course.



The Threefold Lotus Sutra: A Summary and Key Points for Each Chapter

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wondrous Dharma

Chapter 8

The Assurance of Buddhahood Given to the Five Hundred Disciples



The theme of this chapter is the assurance given to Purna and many of the other close disciples that they will surely attain buddhahood. The Buddha assures Purna that he will become the buddha named Dharma Clarified Tathagata. He also assures his other disciples that they will become buddhas called Universal Illumination Tathagatas.

Moreover, the Buddha says, “So will it be with all other *shravakas*,” meaning that any hearer of the teaching who truly strives for enlightenment will finally attain it and become a Universal Illumination Tathagata.

The Buddha also instructs Maha-Kashyapa to bring this message to those who are not present in the assembly—the *shravakas* who stood up from their Dharma seats and left during the episode of the “departure of the five thousand” in chapter 2, “Skillful Means.” The meaning of this, once again, is that as soon as someone hears the teaching of the Buddha, a bond is formed. Even though this person may turn away, the bond is never broken—at some time later, this person will remember and return to the path of the Buddha, and will eventually attain the enlightenment. Similarly, if we, the modern-day disciples of the Buddha, learn the teaching of the Lotus Sutra and practice it, we too will surely become Universal Illumination Tathagatas.

All Will Become Universal Illumination Tathagatas

As the name clearly indicates, a Universal Illumination Tathagata is a presence that casts light everywhere in the world. In the same chapter, the Buddha declares that all of these tathagatas are “giving the next one the assurance,” meaning that one tathagata assures another person, and that person assures yet another person, ever in turn. Each of us who is learn-

ing and practicing the teachings of the Buddha will at some time receive the assurance of becoming a Universal Illumination Tathagata. We also have a duty to give this assurance to another. Thus, gradually, Universal Illumination Tathagatas multiply, and our world will become a pure land filled with light.

This is the meaning we may read from the superb assurance that is the theme of this chapter.

The Parable of the Gem in the Robe

The disciples who directly receive the Buddha’s assurances are overjoyed, and they stand in gratitude before him. Then, Ajnata-Kaundinya confesses the disciples’ mistakes, saying that they have been content with the lesser wisdom obtained by simply removing their defilement, and that they believed they had attained true enlightenment. He recounts this parable to illustrate their oversight:





A certain poor man went to see a close friend. This friend entertained him with food and wine, and he got quite drunk and fell asleep. Meanwhile, his friend had to leave suddenly on business. Not wanting to disturb the man's sleep, the friend sewed a priceless gem in the lining of the man's robe as a gift, because he knew that in recent years his friend had sunk into poverty. Lying there drunk, the man was completely unaware of this.

After waking up, the man saw that his close friend was gone, so he departed and returned to his life of poverty, eventually ending up a vagabond who wandered into another country. He underwent many hardships trying to secure food and clothing for himself, and he felt satisfied with what little income he could scrounge up.

After a considerable time had gone by, the man happened to run into his old friend on the road. The friend was shocked by the man's shabby appearance and said, "How is it that you are still struggling for food and clothing? How foolish are you? I wanted you to be able to have a peaceful and easy life, so on such a day I sewed a priceless jewel into the liner of your robe." Then he reached over and took the jewel from the lining of the filthy collar and said, "Go now and sell that jewel so that you can buy whatever you need; you will be able to live totally free from all poverty and want."

After finishing this parable, Ajnata-Kaundinya and the other disciples express their heartfelt gratitude to the Buddha, saying, "The Buddha is like this man's close friend. When the Buddha was still a bodhisattva he taught all of us that because everyone possesses this priceless jewel—buddha-nature—we are all capable of attaining enlightenment through practice. But we drifted off to sleep and soon forgot about it, and for that reason we were unaware of it. When we attained the *arhat* Way, we mistakenly supposed that simply eliminating our defilements was the supreme enlightenment. However, the aspiration to seek the awakening of a buddha—Supreme Perfect Awakening—remained hidden in the depths of our minds. Somehow, we



sensed that we were lacking something. Just now, the Buddha has awoken us. Now we know that we are really bodhisattvas who have the possibility of eventually becoming buddhas by cultivating bodhisattva practices and doing our best for the people of the world. We are now filled with great joy."

This chapter ends with Ajnata-Kaundinya and the others expressing their sincere gratitude.

Human Beings Have No Knowledge of the Essence of the Self

Buddha-nature encompasses both the capacity to become a buddha and the essence of a buddha. The former indicates that everyone can attain buddhahood someday according to their effort—in this case, we see buddha-nature in relation to our practice of the Buddha Way. The latter means that the essence of every human being is no different from that of a buddha: it is one's essential nature.

Though all of us have buddha-nature in this sense, we have difficulty realizing it. The reason for this is that we firmly believe that the bodies and minds chasing madly after food and clothing and pursuing our desires are none other than our selves.



The poor man of the parable is the very picture of us ordinary people. His rich friend, like the Eternal Buddha who bestows buddha-nature upon every living being, has given him a priceless gem, but he does not realize he has it. We, like him, seek only to satisfy our needs and do not notice the precious thing we have. As a result, we become more lost as we go on and on in the complications of our lives without a chance to be liberated.

Shakyamuni's Teaching Stirs Our Awareness

The Buddha who appeared in this world as Shakyamuni taught that all humankind equally possesses buddha-nature—the priceless jewel in the lining of the poor man's clothes in the parable—and this teaching stirs our awareness. The instant we gain this awareness, our minds expand, brighten, and become free, and we gain great confidence in our future life.

We Are Already Liberated

In summary, the parable teaches us that, in fact, we are already liberated. The essence of every person is the free and unrestricted life—buddha-nature—that is one with the Eternal Original Buddha. Because we do not know this, we are caught in the struggles of life. But it is not difficult to be liberated. We need only to truly awaken to the fact that our essence is buddha-nature, which means we are already liberated.



This is an English translation of text that originally appeared in Japanese in *Hokke sanbu kyo: Kaku hon no aramashi to yoten*, by Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai (Kosei Publishing, 1991 [revised edition, 2016], pp. 86–93).

The Importance of Both Study and Practice

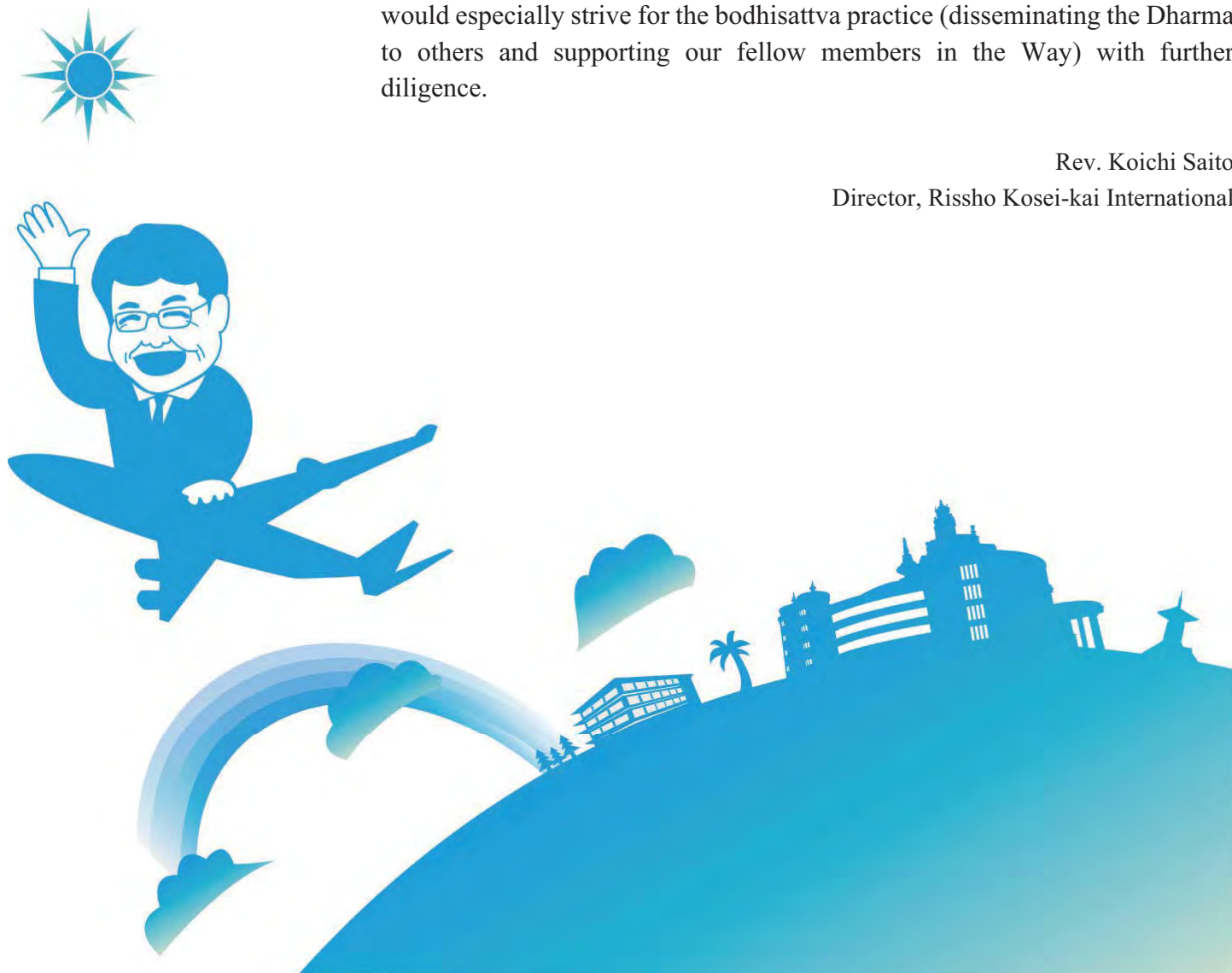
IN his message for this month, President Nichiko Niwano teaches us about studying and practicing the Dharma.

He has repeatedly taught us the importance of studying the Buddha's teachings over and over. This month, he reminds us of the importance of recognizing Truth within the natural world and in all sorts of happenings around us, and listening to the voice of the Buddha therein. This is because all phenomena represent the Dharma that the Buddha preaches by employing an infinite variety of skillful means.

President Niwano also shows us the importance of putting the Buddha's teachings into practice in our daily life, while at the same time studying them over and over. For this to happen, we should make it a habit to perform our three basic practices of the faith, namely, "reciting the sutra," "guiding others to the faith, supporting our fellow members in the Way, and attending *hoza* sessions," and "studying and practicing the Dharma."

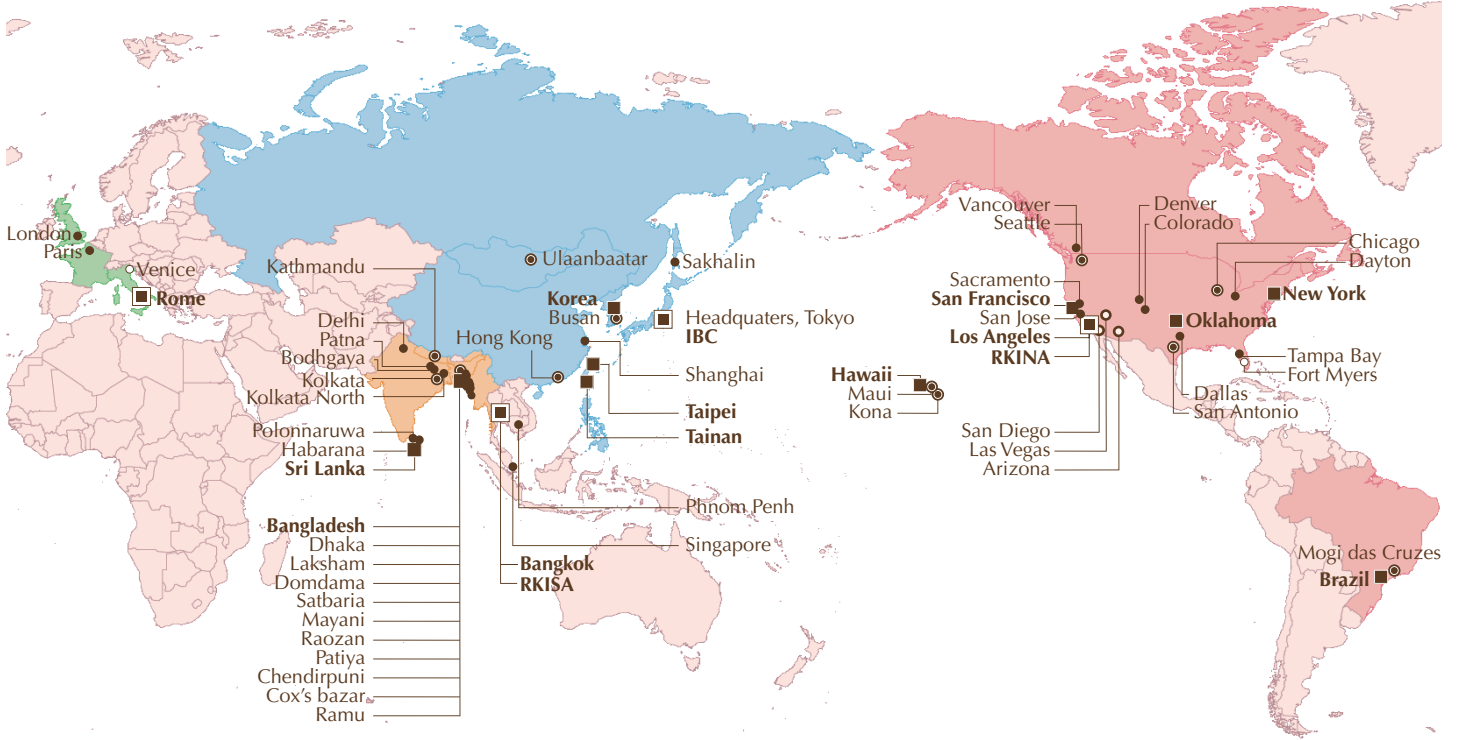
Aiming for the liberation of both ourselves and others, I hope that we would especially strive for the bodhisattva practice (disseminating the Dharma to others and supporting our fellow members in the Way) with further diligence.

Rev. Koichi Saito
Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International



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Rissho Kosei-kai: A Global Buddhist Movement



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